DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 403 949 JC 970 112

TITLE	Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, Exploring America's Communities. Progress Report.
INSTITUTION	Mississippi Gulf Coast Community Coll., Jackson.
SPONS AGENCY	American Association of Community Colleges, Washington, DC.; National Endowment for the Humanities (NFAH), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	Jan 97
NOTE	7p.; In: National Conference on American Pluralism and Identity Program Book (New Orleans, LA, January 18-19, 1997); see JC 970 087.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*American Studies; *Community Colleges; *Cultural Pluralism; Discussion; *Films; Interdisciplinary Approach; *Multicultural Education; Program Descriptions; Reading Materials; Two Year Colleges; United States History; United States Literature
IDENTIFIERS	Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College

ABSTRACT

In 1996, the Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College participated in the American Association of Community Colleges' Exploring America's Communities project, which worked to strengthen the instruction of American history, literature, and culture at U.S. community colleges. The primary objective of the college's action plan was to establish a team-taught, interdisciplinary course using films, historical readings, and literary works to examine the American experience. The course would attempt to explore America's process as a polyglot attempting to assimilate its diverse population, but which often divided itself along lines of race, prejudice, bigotry, religion, and sex. To involve colleagues, at least one workshop on multiculturalism was planned. The following three accomplishments were made: four workshops on multiculturalism were held, reaching approximately 250 members of the college community; an additional section was added to the new course due to high demand; and the team was able to expose the students to a variety of difficult issues facing American society. The project's major obstacles included trying to cover the history of America through film, presenting so many topics, and attempting to create a balanced view of America. While some students were reluctant to acknowledge the existence of some of the situations, and others were at times embarrassed to talk about sensitive issues, the exchange of ideas underscored the multi-cultural aspects of America and emphasized the importance of mutual respect. (HAA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 403 949

Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College
Exploring America's Communities Progress Report

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Gollattscheck

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

In: National Conference on American Pluralism and Identity Program Book
(New Orleans, LA, January 18-19, 1997)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

JC 970 112

PROGRESS REPORT

"Exploring America's Communities: In Quest of Common Ground"

History and Demographics of MGCCC

The roots of Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College (MGCCC) go back 85 years. In 1911, a number of prominent citizens donated 656 acres of land and 626 dollars to establish an agricultural institution in the small town of Perkinston, Mississippi. A year later three buildings were completed, and the institution began operation in the fall of 1912.

In 1962, fifty years later, the Governor of the State of Mississippi signed into law House Bill 597 which created the present Gulf Coast Junior College District. This bill wiped out county lines--the four separate counties of Harrison, Jackson, Stone, and George became one district. The district concept was a pilot program for the state (and was one of the first in the nation). In 1965, two branches of the college were built in Harrison and Jackson counties and a multi-campus district was reality.

Later Centers were built in George County, at Keesler Air Force Base, and in West Harrison County. A final Center was established as a joint partnership with Mississippi Power Company and Harrison County Development Commission to serve as a training facility.

Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College is located in the four southeastern counties of Mississippi. As a multi-campus entity, there are three vibrant and active campuses in the four most populated counties--Stone, Harrison, and Jackson. The Central Office to administer the diversity of MGCCC is located in Stone County on the Perkinston Campus.

Demographically MGCCC serves communities that range from rural to urban. The two coastal counties, Harrison and Jackson, are part of the second most populous urban area in the state with nearly 300 people per square mile. Conversely, the two inland counties, George and Stone, are rural with population densities between 28 and 38 per square mile.

The college district's population is 333,346 people and has achieved a 8.5% growth rate in the last 5 years. Within this population base 78% are white, 19.5% black, 2% Asian, .25% Native American, and .25% other. Unfortunately, 15% of the district's population base includes families who subsist at the poverty level.

The college serves nearly 20,000 people through its credit and noncredit programs each year. This means that approximately 5.9% of the MGCCC District is served in some way by the college. The

"typical" student at MGCCC is a 28 year old white female enrolled full-time in an academic major. Females account for 57% of the student body and males 43%.

The average age of academic students is 26.3 years, technical students 30.1 years, and vocational students 30.1 years.

The racial/ethnic composition of the student body closely parallels the district's. White students account for 78% of the full-time enrollment and 86% of the part-time students. Interestingly, the fastest growing segment of MGCCC is Asian/Pacific Islanders. In the past 5 years this group has grown by 105%. In addition, the number of Hispanic students has increased by more than 31%, and the number of black students has risen by 12%.

In the Fall of 1996 the district had 5,232 full-time credit enrolled students. For Fiscal Year 1996, there were 10,507 students enrolled in Academic courses, 2,616 in Technical courses, and 4,914 in Noncredit courses.

Our MGCCC district will continue its purpose: "to develop the cultural, intellectual, and character resources of the people of this area, point the way to an economic livelihood based on natural resources, and promote responsible citizenship."

Primary Goals of Action Plan

The main objective of our action plan has been to establish a new, team-taught, interdisciplinary course, **Film: the American Experience.** The desired objective has been to explore through great American films, selected historical readings, novels, and short stories, America's process as a polyglot attempting to assimilate itself but often dividing itself along lines of race, prejudice, bigotry, religion, and sex. Additionally, the course seeks to evaluate through films, readings, and discussions what unites us: brotherhood, common interest, tolerance, and respect, as well as greed, religious fervor, love of sports and music, and our response to war.

To involve colleagues in this project, we planned at least one workshop on multiculturalism. Additionally, we scheduled this course to be offered during the Fall Semester of 1996.

Action Plan Accomplishments

1. Instead of just one workshop on multiculturalism and the subject of our new course, our team conducted four workshops which reached approximately 250 staff, faculty, administrators, and students (over the Community College Network).

2. We had planned to offer one section of the new course. **Film: the American Experience** filled by the second day of preregistration, so we opened another section at night.

3. As we will be bringing copies of the Fall syllabus and the revised Spring syllabus to the January meeting, we will be able to show more clearly how we have juxtaposed topics, times, and questions. Through films and novels such as Ragtime, The Reivers, To Kill a Mockingbird, The Grapes of Wrath, A Raisin in the Sun, All the President's Men, Philadelphia, and Dead Man Walking, we exposed the students to a variety of divisive and unifying factors in American society. Among the topics examined in the course were racism, ethnic and religious bigotry, cultural conflicts, AIDS, homophobia, and capital punishment.

Obstacles

With the tremendous financial support from the administration, the fine technical support from our team administrator, Assistant Dean Foster Flint, as well as the advisory support from colleagues, we have been able to develop a course in record time and see it successfully integrated into the scheduled curriculum.

The major obstacles have been trying to cover the history of America through film, presenting so many topics concerning racism, bigotry, greed, etc., and attempting to create a balanced view of America from the vast quantity of material that was available.

"The Best is Yet to Be"

We must include more multicultural films; the course was well represented with films and readings dealing with blacks and whites. However, we seek to include more Asian and Native American films. Furthermore, we need to include more films focusing on gender issues, e.g., Norma Rae, The Joy Luck Club, etc. Next semester, Spring, 1997, we have two sections of **Film: The American Experience** scheduled on the Jefferson Davis Campus, and twenty-six student have already preregistered. Additionally, we are offering the course on the Community College Network.

Responses to What it Means to be an American

During the semester, we have experienced the gamut of emotions, ranging from joyous laughter, sincere appreciation of the endurance of the family in Grapes of Wrath, utter disgust for the hypocrisy of Elmer Gantry, to heated debate over capital punishment in Dead Man Walking. While some students were reluctant to acknowledge the existence of some of the situations, such as anti-semitism, and others, at times seemed embarrassed to talk about

sensitive issues, such as AIDS, the exchange of ideas underscored the multi-cultural aspects of America, and emphasized the importance of mutual respect among the diverse elements of our society. So many ideas have been expressed verbally as well as in writing. Yet, one group of five, a community in the making, wrote the following paper which seems to sum up many of the ideas expressed this semester:

"To be born in America is to be born into a country of great diversity. Nowhere else on earth is there such a mingling of race, culture, and heritage. America is called the great 'melting pot,' but the country should be likened to a mixer on very low speed. The people in this country do not melt into one homogenous blend. Americans are more like the ingredients in a stew. They each retain their own individuality and uniqueness. These differences are what give America its flavor. Our differences can be used as either an asset or a liability. Every person has his own inherent weaknesses and strengths. We can focus on the other person's weaknesses and ignore our own, or we can use each other's strengths to counterbalance our own weaknesses. The ability to do the latter is what makes America strong, and the tendency do the first is what hurts this country.

Of all obstacles to unity in the United States, economic disparity builds the highest and most effective barriers. Differences in race, religious beliefs, educational level, and social class may separate people, but income is truly the great divider. An immense difference in income levels exists in America. As long as it exists, there will be conflict and division among Americans.

It is hard to rise above, or get ahead even a little, when just feeding a family is a man's top priority. The Grapes of Wrath and Native Son are prime examples of this. The Joads were honest, hard-working people. They had struggled their whole lives to make their little farm productive. They had not time for education because everyone worked on the farm. Without education they had no job skills, and without job skills they were unable to find work when they arrived in California. They were destitute when they lost their farm.

Bigger Thomas and his family were in the same predicament. The mother did not earn enough to support her family, so Bigger had to quit school in the eighth grade and go to work. There was not money for education, but without education it was impossible for Bigger to find a decent job. The money he and his mother earned was barely enough to feed them. There was not way out of the cycle of ignorance and poverty. Bigger realized the hopelessness of his life, and that, not some inborn evil, is what drove him to kill.

Dead Man Walking clearly voiced that there were no rich men on

Death Row. This is a sad commentary on America's justice system. If the main character had had enough money to hire a more experienced attorney, he would not have been either.

The Age of Innocence and The Molly Maguires were set in the same time period and in close geographic regions. The characters in the movies were from different social classes, but it was money that kept them apart. The main concerns of the affluent, New York society crowd were clothes and looks. The coal miners of Pennsylvania, including the young children, were working fourteen hours a day, seven days a week, just to eat.

In the United States, as it is worldwide, it is our humanity that unites us. In both novels and films were the characters who were able to see beyond color, religion, or class, and accept others as worthwhile human beings that made the difference. Atticus Finch (To Kill a Mockingbird), Max the lawyer (Native Son), Sister Helen Prejean (Dead Man Walking), and Boss (The Reivers), were memorable characters because of their ability to understand human nature. They did not see rich and poor, or black and white, or good and evil. They simply saw people and were wise enough to know that people are different, but that difference does not mean that some are better than others. They valued and respected human life. Each of these characters tried to pass this wisdom on to other people, and by doing so they removed some of the ignorance in the world. Only by learning about and accepting our differences, will America ever be truly united."